



**Directorate of  
Intelligence**

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# **Nicaragua-El Salvador: Potosi Probable Waterborne Infiltration Point**

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**Imagery Analysis Report**

NGA Review Complete

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November 1983  
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**Nicaragua-El Salvador:  
Potosi Probable Waterborne  
Infiltration Point**

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Summary

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The facility, which is located on the northern edge of Potosi, was originally a commercial transshipment area. We believe it began to function as an infiltration point for men and materiel to El Salvador in 1981 and has been used for that purpose since then.

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The facility at Potosi consists of a large, lighted, wooden pier; two POL tanks; a warehouse; and two nearby groups of buildings where men and supplies could be housed. It is guarded by a military outpost located just outside its main entrance. The infiltration of men and supplies to El Salvador appears to be carried out primarily with large canoes that cross either the Gulf of Fonseca or the open sea to the Salvadoran coast.

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However, canoes and other small craft, ideally suited for waterborne infiltration operations, have been observed at the facility. In addition, on several occasions Nicaraguan patrol boats have been observed in the Potosi area under circumstances that suggest they were supporting infiltration operations.

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Information available as of 11 October 1983 was used in this report.

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The author of this paper is [redacted] Office of Imagery Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Third World Forces Division, OIA, [redacted]

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## Introduction

Infiltration of men, arms, and munitions from Nicaragua to the insurgents in El Salvador continues to be a subject of serious concern for the Intelligence Community. [REDACTED]

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This report discusses [REDACTED] a facility at Potosi in northwestern Nicaragua is being used as an infiltration point to the insurgents in El Salvador. [REDACTED]

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## Discussion

Potosi is a small village located on the Gulf of Fonseca in northwest Nicaragua, about 50 kilometers from El Salvador (figure 1). [REDACTED]

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the Potosi area is being used to infiltrate men and supplies to the Salvadoran insurgents. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The facility consists of a lighted, wooden pier measuring 6 meters by 86 meters; a 25-meter by 40-meter warehouse; two 28,000-liter horizontal POL tanks; a group of 10 buildings located west of the warehouse; and another group of three buildings located east of the warehouse. [REDACTED] The entire facility is fenced and there is a gate or barricade across the road leading into it. A guard post is located just inside the gate/barricade and two foxholes are located beside it. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] A military outpost--the only one identified in Potosi--is located just outside the entrance. This outpost has several small buildings and is ringed with defensive trenching. [REDACTED]

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The Potosi facility originally functioned as a terminal for the Potosi-La Union, El Salvador ferry. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] at least 13 semitrailers and 11 smaller trucks were parked in the facility compound near the warehouse and pier. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] all signs of commercial transshipment activity had ceased. We believe that in 1981 the facility began to function as an infiltration point for supplies and men destined for the guerrillas in El Salvador and has been used for that purpose since then. [REDACTED]

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Figure 1

Location of Potosi, Nicaragua



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The location of the military outpost suggests that its primary function is to guard the facility. It is positioned just outside the main entrance to the facility--a location with no tactical advantage for defending the town of Potosi, other installations, or road intersections. The outpost was enlarged and its defenses were expanded significantly between early 1981, shortly after the facility had ceased to function as a commercial transshipment area, and December 1982, when we believe it was actively engaged in infiltrating men and materiel to El Salvador. [REDACTED]

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Although on a few occasions Nicaraguan patrol boats have been observed anchored several hundred meters offshore of Potosi village, the primary activity at the infiltration facility is the presence of canoes/small boats along the shoreline. These small craft are ideally suited for waterborne infiltration operations. Since 1981, we have frequently seen between one and five canoes/small boats along the beach from 20 to 100 meters north and south of the pier but still within the confines of the facility. They have never been tied up at the pier. [REDACTED]

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Other than the presence of the canoes/small boats, which are often partially hidden under the trees along the shore, it appears that great care has been taken to conceal activity at the facility--suggesting the facility has a covert function. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] No vehicles, 25X1  
troop formations, or other groups of people have been observed within the compound over the nearly three-year period. Nor have any vessels other than canoes/small boats been seen near the pier. This apparent lack of activity within the compound is not compatible with a facility having either a commercial/industrial function or an overt military function such as a patrol boat or military logistics facility. [REDACTED]

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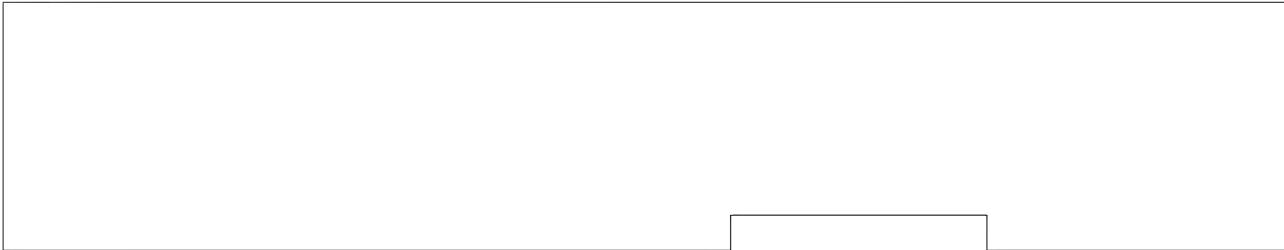
While obvious signs of activity within the facility have been extremely rare, this does not indicate that the facility is inactive. In addition to the pile of materials and POL tanks which appeared in March and August 1982 respectively, we have observed that paths leading from the warehouse to the two groups of buildings and elsewhere within the compound have remained worn and fresh. [REDACTED] a vehicle was observed just outside the main entrance gate, awaiting entrance into the facility. [REDACTED]

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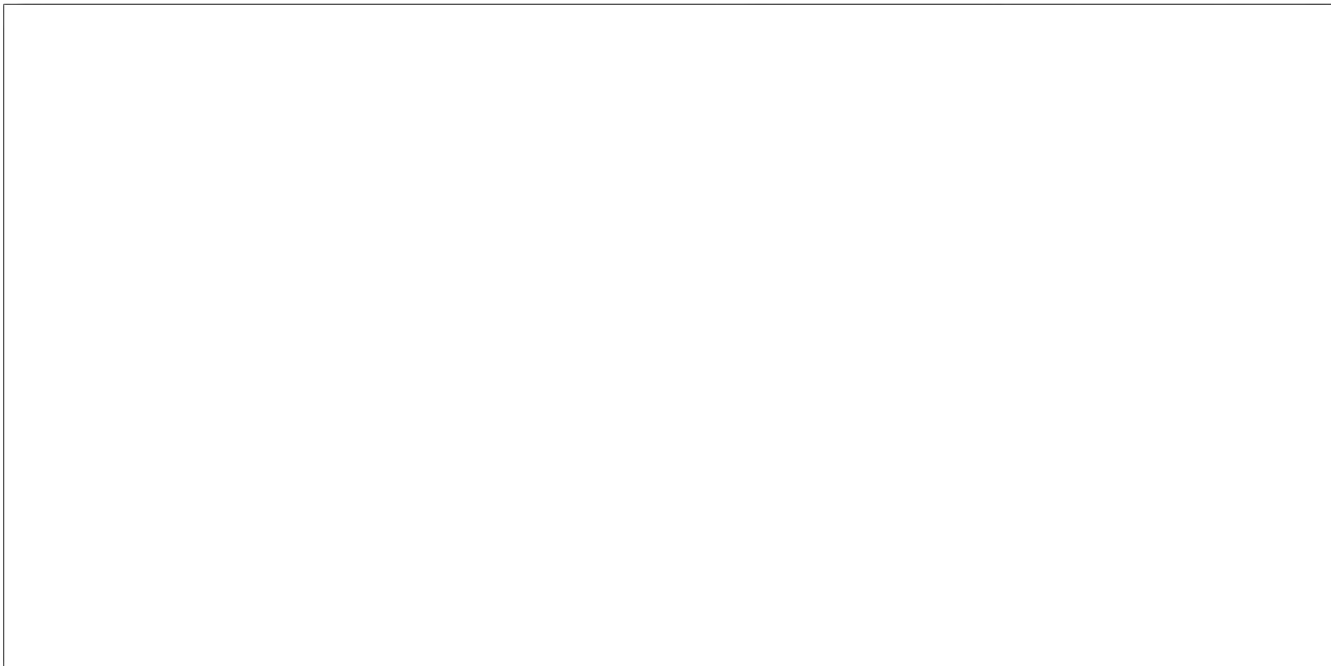
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Men and supplies intended for El Salvador would most likely be delivered overland to Potosi by road from Managua through Leon and Chinandega (figure 1). An alternate method would be by sea, in which case men and supplies would arrive at Potosi, be transferred to canoes/small boats, and be infiltrated into El Salvador. Few vessels larger than canoes have been observed in the Potosi area. However, on three occasions a Dabur patrol boat was seen anchored several hundred meters offshore of Potosi village and about 800 meters southeast of the probable infiltration facility. Two of the sightings were on consecutive days in early May 1983 when an unidentified boat, slightly more than half as long as the Dabur, was anchored immediately astern of the patrol



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boat. We do not know what type of activity was under way, [REDACTED]

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A Dabur patrol boat was sighted for the third time [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] The boat was anchored several hundred meters offshore with a large tarp draped across the aft deck and a large canoe moored alongside [REDACTED]. The combination of the patrol boat, the canoe, and the tarp at this location indicates that there was an arms transfer in progress, with the tarp being used to conceal or protect the materials onboard the patrol boat.<sup>2</sup> While the three patrol boat sightings suggest that infiltration activities were under way in the Potosi area, we cannot specifically link the patrol boats' activities with the Potosi probable infiltration facility. [REDACTED]

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Canoes probably cross either the Gulf of Fonseca or the open sea to the Salvadoran coast at night. If the wooden canoes remain close to the Nicaraguan coast until they are west of Punta San Jose they probably would not be detected by Honduran or Salvadoran surveillance. Once the canoes begin crossing the Gulf of Fonseca near its mouth or farther west through the open sea, they are difficult to detect at night because of the large waves. [REDACTED]

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References

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Documents

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Document references are available upon request.

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